



Okay, you've joined Westford Sportsmen's Club and you're curious about trap - the activity whose building and fields you can see and hear from the clubhouse front porch. Let's say it's Sunday afternoon and the trap field is active. Now what?

This page is to help you feel welcome at the trap house, sharing some do's and don'ts that apply whether you're coming from a different sport or brand new to shotgunning.

**DO observe** to start with, come over and watch whenever people are shooting, just remember to **DO wear ear and eye protection**. You're welcome to sit around the trap building or move up to the scorer's bench (under the umbrella), but **DON'T interfere with a scorer** who (when present) has to concentrate on each shot. After watching a couple of rounds you'll understand how shooters take 5 shots on a particular spot (one of 5 "Posts") then rotate to the next one until everyone has completed 25 shots.

**DO introduce yourself to the "Opener"** - the committee member (with clipboard announcing the next squad to shoot) who is responsible for the day's safe operation of the field and collecting shoot fees. He or she is familiar with the "regulars" and will happily connect you with someone to walk you through the basics. **DO ask questions;** trap shooters love to talk trap and shotguns, and you can collect as many opinions on how to shoot as you have time for. And asking "what shotgun should I get for trap?" is guaranteed to generate numerous opinions.

**DO arrange a shotgun** if you want to shoot. Many regulars have an extra gun a newcomer may use. Your chances go up if you alert folks the previous week that you'll need one. **DO bring your own "Target Load" shells** (#7-1/2, #8 or #9 size shot), but **DON'T bring Hunting Loads - they're prohibited** due to range limits.

**DO ask about shotguns** and feel free to look at ones on the rack - but **DON'T touch** unless you've located the owner and have permission. Also (I suggest) **DON'T ask to try one**. If the owner is comfortable with others shooting it, he or she will likely offer you a try. But if they don't, you need to understand that shotguns can be very expensive, are often exquisitely, individually fitted, and likely pampered treasures.

With this prep behind you, we'll move on to your first trap shots. It'll be fun!

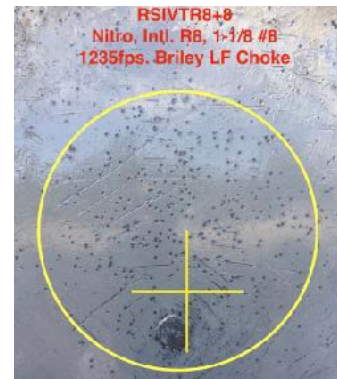
So by now you've spent some time around the trap building, observed trap squads, talked with the regulars, and arranged a shotgun with some target-load shells. And, as always on the trap field, you have eye and ear protection. Naturally, we'll assume you've read the manual or been fully briefed on your gun's operation...also how to mount the gun firmly against your body to avoid painful recoil. What comes next?

**DO Safety First** Know and follow all the fundamental NRA gun safety rules; treat every gun as if it's loaded, keep it pointed in a safe direction, keep your finger off the trigger until ready to shoot, and keep it unloaded until ready to shoot. We'll look at how these are incorporated into trap line etiquette once you're preparing to join a squad; at this stage following the basic rules conscientiously will keep you and others safe.

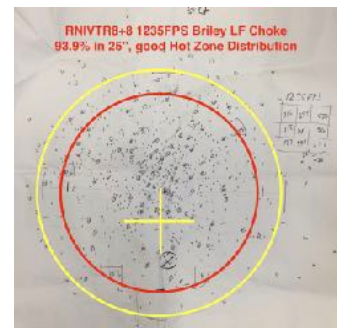
**DO Meet the Pattern Boards.** To the left of Field 1 there are two panels, a grease-covered steel plate and a plastic lattice to hold sheets of paper. You can shoot into them whenever WSC allows outdoor firing even if the fields aren't opened. There's a roll of paper for the lattice in the trap building but for now we'll do without. Find the putty knife in the adjacent bucket and smooth out the grease panel.



You'll stand at concrete pads set in the ground (roughly 16 and 31 yards from the pattern boards). When it's clear, take aim at the central bump and shoot. Now inspect the pellet divots in the grease; what we look for is how the circle of divots compares to where you aimed. "Field Guns" typically shoot flat, with half the pattern above, half below your point of aim (POA). Trap guns are often set up so pellets will go higher than the POA - which helps keep the muzzle from blocking your view of normal rising targets. In this picture the reticle shows where the muzzle was pointed, the circle helps define the basic pattern which is centered well above POA.



**DO learn your patterns** Obviously these boards give you something to shoot at while getting started, but there's more to it. Patterns show how your shot stream will be distributed when it crosses the target's path. You want an even spread with most pellets in a circle from 25"-30" in diameter. You should be prepared to experiment with different shot shells, heavier or lighter loads, and more or less constrictive chokes (if your shotgun accepts them) to learn the combination that works best for you. But for now, it's enough that you know whether the pattern is centered where the muzzle is aimed, or above it.



**DO NOTE:** *If the pattern is well left or right of your POA, there's likely a gun fit issue; ask the regulars for help. FYI We'll cover fitting basics in later articles.*

Shooting at moving clay targets is fundamentally different than firing at fixed panels. We recommend that beginners first practice from a single post at targets on a fixed trajectory; this allows you to develop some basic timing and eye coordination with far less confusion and frustration. WSC offers two ways to do this; a fixed, manually operated thrower, and a personal training session run with a WSC-qualified opener.

### Using the Fixed Trap Machine

**DO Use the Fixed Thrower** under the blue barrel on Field 1. This is available to members during WSC shooting hours when the field is not in use. It's operated by a spring which is downstairs in the main clubhouse, hanging in a bag on the wall near the clock (on the right side down the ramp).

**DON'T use manual/portable clay throwers** these are prohibited for safety reasons.

**DO Bring your own clays;** you can get clays from sporting goods stores; our rare misses :- ) also leave some intact clays around the trap field.

**DO Bring a Friend;** the machine is manually operated and awkward to use alone.

**DO Shoot only from the Designated Station** within the wood frame. This ensures your shot will fall in safe areas.

**DO Put everything back** when done, covering the machine and returning the spring to the clubhouse, notify the trap chair of any problems.

### Have a Personal Training Session

**DO arrange a time with a WSC Opener** either (if a field is available) during one of our regular open trap times (Sunday afternoons 1:00-3:00) or other time during the week when outdoor shooting is allowed on club grounds.

The opener will warm up and set one of our two Pat-Trap machines to fire on a fixed trajectory with manual control. You'll often start with straightaway shots, for example the straight out shot from the center post (#3). Once you're beginning to get solid hits, you can try shots from different posts, and work into calling for clays from each post and shooting at randomized trajectories.

**DO arrange payment** for the clays used, normal per-round rates apply. The opener will record the payment and deposit any cash.

Great - now that you're familiar with trap posts and trajectories, you're ready to join a five-person squad. Here's what you need to fit right in; a combination of safety rules, common courtesy, and trap traditions.

### DO learn and follow squad etiquette\*

- **SIGN UP** on the squad sheet in the Trap Building, but **DON'T** sign yourself for Squad Leader (Post 1) until you're more familiar with those responsibilities. Remember which post you're on, and which field you'll shoot.
- **IF** you prefer to have an experienced shooter help coach you through the round, just ask. They'll stand just behind you and help you keep up with the squad.
- **BE READY** with eye and hearing protection and 25+ shells before your squad is called, so you don't delay the round. Be sure your gun is unloaded, and keep the barrel pointed in a safe direction at all times.
- **IF YOU HAVE A SEMIAUTO**, install a shell catcher or elastic band around your receiver to prevent your shells from peppering your neighbor.
- **LISTEN** for the opener to call your squad, he'll call out five names in post order. Move promptly to your assigned post and settle into your stance.
- **WATCH** the squad leader, who will want to see that you're ready to go, then call for a clay to check the machine settings. After their first shot, the round is on.
  - *The pace will seem impossibly fast when you're starting out - don't try to match experienced shooters, just do your best to be ready for your turn.*
- **DON'T CLOSE YOUR ACTION** on a shell until just after your neighbor's shot.
  - *Note: the sound of your action can trigger an extra clay unless it comes right after a shot. If you need more time, move action away from the microphone.*
- **KEEP MUZZLE DOWNRANGE** as you close your action and mount the gun
- **CALL and SHOOT - remembering muzzle control during followthrough-** then remain standing quietly until your next turn comes.
- **AFTER FIVE SHOTS** prepare to move the next post, but stand quiet until the #5 shooter (on whichever post they are) has fired. The squad leader or scorer may call "All Move", or the squad may simply start shifting right. "All Out" will signal the end of the round, be patient and stay still until the last shot has been taken.
- **FROM POST FIVE** during a move, turn to your right before heading to Post 1 - this will keep your muzzle away from your approaching neighbor's. The squad leader will wait for you to signal from Post 1 that you're ready before continuing - a thumbs up or other obvious gesture is helpful.
- **IF YOU HAVE A PROBLEM** like a squib or jam, **KEEP THE MUZZLE DOWNRANGE** and seek help, don't assume the barrel is clear until a rod (at scorer's chair) or wad knocker has confirmed it.

**CONGRATULATIONS - YOU'RE A TRAP SHOOTER!**

\*Some points courtesy of Nevada State Shooting Association